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Exploring the Career and College Readiness of High School Students Serviced by RAMP and Non-RAMP School Counseling Programs in North Carolina

Researchers conducted a study to determine if differences existed in high school student college and career readiness between those enrolled at high schools with Recognized ASCA Model Programs (RAMP) and non-RAMP high schools. Results indicated that students who are serviced by RAMP school counseling programs had statistically significant higher SAT and ACT WorkKeys scores and college enrollment.

Researchers

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Research Questions

Is there a difference in schoolwide college- and career-ready student outcomes between an experimental group of RAMP-designated schools and a sample of control schools without RAMP designation?

Is there a statistical difference in American College Testing (ACT) scores, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, ACT WorkKeys assessment scores and the number of graduates who enroll in college between the experimental group of RAMP designated schools and the control group of schools?

Summary of Findings

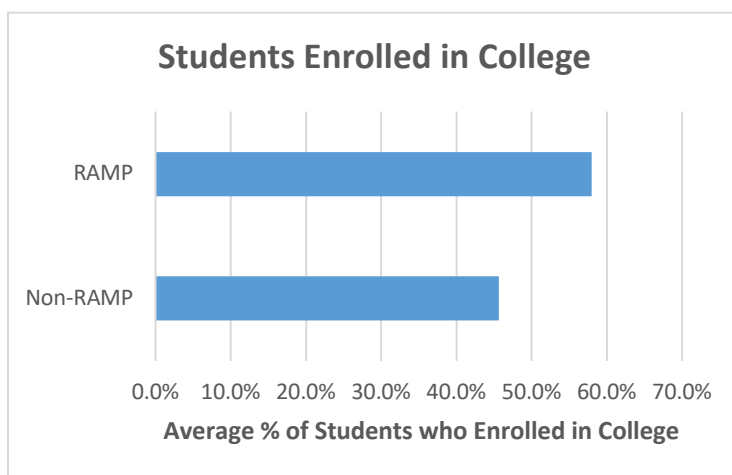
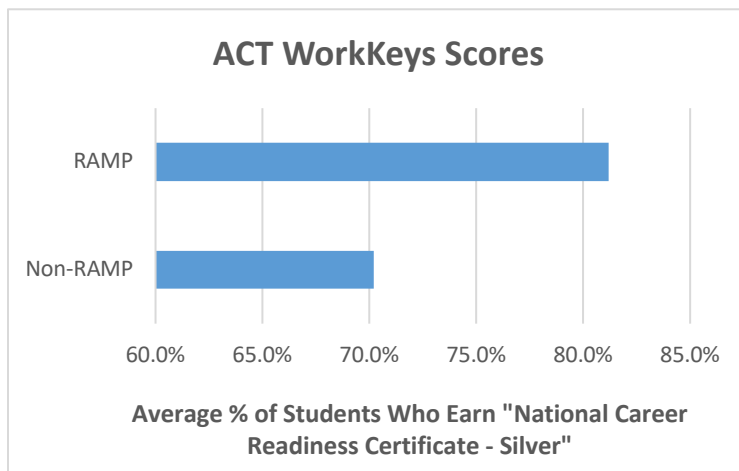
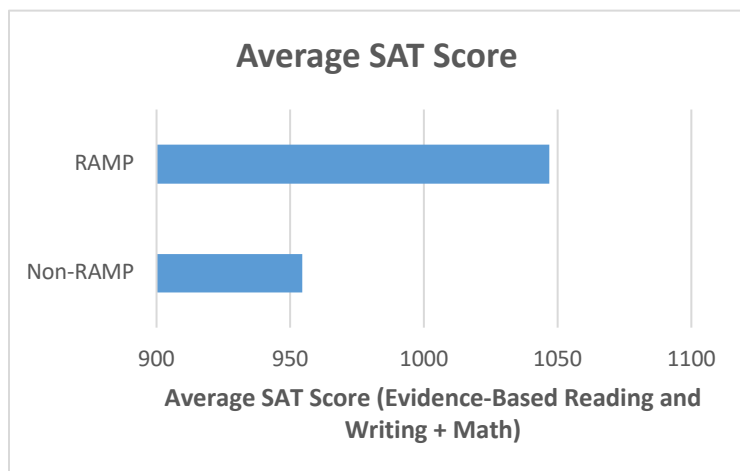
The average of all variables for students who attended RAMP high schools was higher than non-RAMP schools. Statistically significant differences were found in the average SAT and WorkKeys scores and the percentage of students enrolled in college upon high school graduation. Twelve high schools in North Carolina held the RAMP designation between 2013 and 2018. This group was used as an experimental group and 41 schools without RAMP designation were selected as a control group. The control group included schools that were located in similar areas (i.e., large city, midsize city, etc.) and similar school types (i.e., traditional, magnet, etc.) as the group of RAMP schools. The school-wide data were collected from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and ASCA.

The ACT WorkKeys assessment consists of three subtests: Applied Math, Locating Information, and Reading for Information. Students can earn ACT's National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) after taking the ACT WorkKeys assessment. Certificates are awarded at the Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze level. The data source used in this study was the percentage of students who achieved a minimum NCRC of Silver.

ACT is administered to students in grade 11. ACT consists of four subject tests: English, Reading, Math, and Science, and an additional Writing component. The four subject tests make up a composite score. The data source used in this study was the percentage of students meeting a minimum ACT Composite Score of 17. A Composite Score of 17 is the public University of North Carolina System's minimum admission requirement.

Students take End-of-Course assessments at the conclusion of three courses: English II, NC Math I, and Biology. Students' performances on NC End-of-Course assessments are reported in levels ranging from 1 to 5. Students who receive a minimum Achievement Level of 4 are considered on track to be career and college ready.

College and Career Variables: RAMP vs. Non-RAMP



A statistically significant difference was found between RAMP and non-RAMP schools on the measure of SAT scores. Students at RAMP high schools scored on average 92 points higher ($F=6.197$, $p=.017$, partial $n^2=.137$). The percent of high school graduates who enrolled in college were higher for RAMP schools than non-RAMP schools. The average percentage of students at RAMP high schools who enrolled in college was 58% and the average at non-RAMP high schools was 45.6% ($F=8.553$, $p=.006$, partial $n^2=.180$). More high schools students attending RAMP schools scored at the Silver level or above on the ACT WorkKeys assessment than students at non-RAMP schools. RAMP schools had 11% more students earn the National Career Ready Certificate, Silver or higher, than non-RAMP school students ($F=4.843$, $p=.034$, partial $n^2=.110$).

Implications for School Counselors

Similar to the study by Wilkerson et al. (2013) that “yielded encouraging results about the potential impact of RAMP programs on student achievement” (p. 183), the present study contributes to the RAMP program literature by providing evidence that supports the positive contribution of RAMP status to student college and career readiness. The research results align with the following observations by O’Connor (2018) regarding the critical differences school counselors can make in students’ lives:

School counselors have a long record of working effectively with students, parents, fellow educators, and community members to create new paths of learning, achievement, and self-discovery. While much of this work is done behind the scenes, it has been empirically shown to make a difference in the lives of our students and our schools. More important, that difference resides in the hearts and minds of students who are leading stronger, healthier lives, thanks to the school counselor who supported them and showed them more of what their lives could be. (p. 38)

As research continues to support the benefits of RAMP designation in schools, school counselors will have more data to demonstrate the impact of purposeful school counseling programs to school and district administrators. As school counselors continue to be inundated with other duties as assigned by supervisors, it is imperative to demonstrate the individual and systemic impact of school counselors who are devoted to career and college readiness. RAMP designation and career and college readiness student outcomes are positively correlated; therefore, a commitment to increasing the number of RAMP schools and supporting more college readiness efforts could prove to be advantageous for all.

A limitation to this study is that many variables that could impact student college and career readiness were not explored. The results from this study lead to more questions. Future research may focus on determining what specific characteristics of schools with RAMP designation impact college and career readiness.

References

O'Connor, P. J. (2018). How school counselors make a world of difference. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(7), 35–39.

Wilkerson, K., Perussé, R., & Hughes, A. (2013). Comprehensive school counseling programs and student achievement outcomes: A comparative analysis of RAMP versus non-RAMP schools. *Professional School Counseling*, 16(3), 172–184. doi: 10.5330/PSC.n.2013-16.172

About the ASCA Research Grants

The American School Counselor Association awards research grants for projects examining the effectiveness of comprehensive school counseling programs, particularly the ASCA National Model, in improving student outcomes; projects investigating the optimal school-counselor-to-student ratio(s); and other projects that advance school counseling practice. ACT has provided funding support for the grants. Learn more about ASCA at www.schoolcounselor.org.